I am the sheriff.

I am the law.

Even my name is not important, it has been years, so many years that no one mentions it anymore, it’s not even relevant to me.

I am just that: the sheriff.

I don't remember my parents; I don't think I ever knew them. I was raised by an old man, a former lawman. Honorable, fair, and demanding, yet loving and with an impeccable sense of morality. He was an exemplary man, someone I still aspire to become, more than a decade after his death.

I carry a revolver on my hip, the same peacemaker my mentor used to sentence so many wrongdoers, turning this border town into a small oasis of peace in these times of death.

And now, I mete out justice through this very barrel.

I am quick.

I am the fastest. No man has been born who can blink faster than the time it takes me to draw! If they are not hundreds, they are thousands. Murderers, thieves, swindlers, and all sorts of miscreants, all have fallen lifeless before my iron hand, confident when they see the brown patch covering the place where my left eye once was.

The townsfolk love me; they all trust me. They know perfectly well that my desire to protect them springs from the depths of my soul and that my skill with the revolver is impervious to the lure of evil. Never. I have never succumbed to greed! If only you knew the amount of money that has been offered to me, you would truly understand my dedication to the cause!

Terrible people have passed through here. The worst outlaws the West has ever birthed, but their luck has always been cut short on the other side of the mouth of my gun.

A few years ago, I heard about a bandit in a tavern, the worst bandit I have ever heard of. They called him Ron The Rotten; a scoundrel of the worst kind. I heard about his multiple homicides, all the places he robbed, all those families he ruined, and even the trains he derailed. Who knows how many innocent lives were ruined by the evil of that man?! And as if it were the work of fate itself, or as if it were the work of the Lord, who uses my hand to punish those soulless ones who roam everywhere, just a few days ago, a young damsel and her little child were vilely kidnapped on the outskirts of town.

I searched for them everywhere. Not a single home was left unsearched, and it's worth noting that not a single friendly neighbor objected to letting me in, nor did I leave any cave or hiding spot unexamined. They were nowhere to be found.

My sorrow was immense. A young woman and her child, snatched from the town right under my nose, and I couldn't do anything about it. Such shame! Grief and anger swirled in my mind, and not even going to church could calm such fury. No one blamed me, and even the peaceful peasants tried to cheer me up as they saw me riding through the

streets, lost in my thoughts. But just imagining the horrors those two poor souls might be enduring made my heart ache.

A certain morning, I woke up and found a correspondent waiting for me outside. His face was pale, and he was sweating profusely. He approached me and placed a folded paper in my hands. I pleaded with him to calm down, but he insisted that I must read what the paper said right at that moment.

I agreed, but then it was me who paled as I read the name of the sender, the next audacious individual that God had placed before me to administer punishment.

From: Ron The Rotten.

To: The Sheriff.

I carefully unfolded the paper, and my anger must have been so fervent upon finishing reading the note that this time the correspondent begged me to regain my composure.

"Stop searching, Kevin. That whore you're looking for and her little piece of trash aren't in your small town. Don't worry, they're safe. I haven't harmed a hair on them. Yet.

The tales of towns across the county speak of you, sheriff. So, are you the fastest? The strongest? God's mighty hand dispensing justice on Earth? You're just words, that's what you are. If you love your town so much and desire to rescue these two poor creatures, then you'll have to get through me. Take it as a challenge, Kevin. Exactly one week from now, at sunset in front of the church in town, at seven o'clock in the evening, I will put an end to your miserable life in a fair duel. If you manage to defeat me, you will find the whereabouts of those two locked up in a letter in one of my pockets. But if you fall dead from one of my bullets, then I will personally set fire to that little town of yours and turn it to ashes. I will kill the men and the children and take the women for myself. It's not like anyone will miss it anyway! I'll be waiting for you, sheriff. And I trust you won't try any cheap tricks. If at least one of those rumors about you is true, you'll appreciate the opportunity to duel with the great, the fearsome Ron, The Rotten."

Forgive him, Lord! He's deranged! He doesn't know what he's doing, who he's messing with, or whom he's speaking to! His schemes are so pronounced that he has even found a way to learn my name!

I, who was bestowed with this gift of dealing death to fulfill your will in life, will put an end to the worst, the most malevolent of all evils.

And I will do it right now.

The time proposed by that scum has already passed.

The poor people, unjustly caught up in this mess, are all hiding in their homes. They watch from their windows, praying to the Lord not to let my fingers falter against the most formidable opponent I've ever faced.

Me? I'm not afraid!

The reddish sky doesn't distract me, for on the horizon, I can see a solitary silhouette approaching on a horse. That's Ron. That tall man with his worn hat, his red scarf fluttering in the wind, and his black leather coat exudes wickedness from every pore of his skin.

I'm not afraid. In fact, I have longed for this to happen. There's no need for mere words. Ron positions himself on the other side of the church and dismounts, yelling at the poor animal accompanying him to move aside.

We lock eyes.

That's Ron. That's the worst, the most heartless, the vilest creature who has dared to set foot in MY town. I just need him to move a muscle. If he dares to flex his wrist, he'll be left staring at the sky, with his clothes as red as his scarf!

And there it is! The church clock strikes seven, and the bells ring with vigor, announcing the arrival of death looming over our heads.

Ron swiftly lowers his hand, and without any effort or delay, he reveals the leather concealing his weapon, gripping the handle of his revolver, ready to end the life of justice I carry.

But it's already too late for him. In fact, it was already too late for him from the moment he set foot in this blessed town! I don't even allow him to draw his weapon from its holster, and Ron falls to the ground, pushed by the lead fired from my peacemaker.

The townspeople rejoice, everyone shouts with joy.

Because I am the law.

I am the fastest.

I am Kevin, the sheriff.

. . .

My whole life has been a feast of sin.

I started my life as an outlaw when I was very young. My father was a ruthless man who delighted in mistreating me. I often escaped to steal chickens or fruits or whatever I could eat because he refused to provide food for me or my mother. She was a poor peasant who lacked the means, the courage, and even the desire to escape him, resigned to letting the days pass by.

I got into so much trouble that I couldn't even enumerate them all. Drunken fights as a child, eluding the agents from nearby towns on stolen horses with a small gang of vandals to rob them in another town, theft upon theft. Everyone in the village detested me, which only worsened the already tarnished image of my father, who vented all his frustration by beating me even harder.

By the time I turned ten, my mother was pregnant. Our house was very small, and there was neither space, nor food, nor patience for one more mouth. That's why, after giving the baby a name and a blanket to cover him, that beast of a father took the child just weeks after he was born and left. He returned three days later, terribly drunk and with a bag of coins in his hand... but without the little baby.

The loss of that poor little brother was more than I could bear. I didn't care about the fate my mother might have suffered, and tired of sharing my air with that repulsive man, one ordinary night, I stole his revolver and his horse and rode away, never to return. Mother, dear mother, if only I had decided to take you with me, both your life and mine could have been so, so different.

I am a man filled with regrets.

As the years went by, I only became worse.

What started with stealing chickens and horses soon turned into robbing stores and caravans. I am skilled with the revolver, always have been.

I can no longer recall when, during one of those many heists, I committed my first murder, and that was finally the leap into the abyss that condemned my soul.

Before I could even realize it, almost every robbery ended with an innocent person dead, and I didn't care. Gold corrupted me. I could have anything with enough money. Everything I couldn't have as a child. I would go to any city, and with just a couple of bills, I indulged in the finest meals, the most beautiful women, and the most luxurious motel rooms.

Without anyone's help, because I never joined any of the many gangs that sent messengers to invite me to join their criminal endeavors, I robbed hundreds of trains and banks. I was a genius in my field. Derailing a train on my own had become as easy as stealing a chicken from a field. Nothing could stop me. The lawmen, those hardened individuals who swore to hunt me down wherever I went, ended up dead, defeated, or bought off by a generous sum of money.

I was feared. Feared and respected in equal measure. No man, knowing who I was, dared to stand in my way!

Eventually, I got rid of the weapon I had stolen from my father so long ago. I didn't want it anymore. I didn't want anything with me that reminded me of my past; my name alone was more than enough.

I was the king.

I was the king of the Wild West.

But... on a day like any other, during one of those random bank robberies in some insignificant town...

It's true that I never joined any gang, but no one said no to me when I recruited them for a heist. They all came to me more than willing, as the name "The Rotten" was synonymous with success among criminals. I just had to walk into a seedy tavern and make myself known to have at my disposal as many crooks as I needed.

That town was no problem. In fact, the heist was quite simple. With enough men, we broke into the bank through the front door and opened fire left and right. No matter how many agents tried to stop us, they weren't enough. And I didn't care how many of my allies fell prey to the bullets of the law; I only cared about myself.

We loaded the safe with dynamite and blew the door open. The gold was ours. We packed it in bags and bid farewell; from there on, each of us would go our separate ways. Without stopping to shoot or cause even more chaos, I ran out of the bank through the back door with the gold on my back.

I am The Rotten, rotten to the core of my heart. Yes, I am beyond redemption, but no one can stop me either.

I ran to the other end of the town, sneaking into houses so the agents couldn't track me. There, just behind the church, I had left my horse tied up.

Once there, I only had to worry about securing the gold to the saddle, untying the horse, and mounting it to ride away at full gallop. But then a deep voice sounded behind me as I loaded the bag; 'Stop!' he said. A man had managed to catch up with me, and to make matters worse, he was only a few steps behind me. He had me at his mercy. But no, it couldn't be like that. I am Ron, I am unstoppable.

Without even turning to look, I took the revolver in my right hand and crossed it in front of me, revealing it under my left arm, and fired twice. Only then did I turn to see if perhaps more men were coming after me.

But there was no one. Not a single agent in sight.

On the ground, clutching his chest as the red blood darkened his black garments, there was an old man. An aged and gray-haired priest whose chest rose and fell at a discouraging rhythm.

I lowered the weapon and wiped the sweat from my brow. It wasn't that at this point killing an innocent would make me hesitate, but there was something terribly dreadful about killing a man of faith. However, that wouldn't stop me either. He was just another unfortunate victim in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Or so it would have been, if I hadn't heard him whisper those last words just before closing his eyes forever.

"I forgive you, son. Just as the Lord will."

I couldn't understand why, and I still can't comprehend it today, but those words made me drop the bag of gold, mount my horse, and flee. Flee from what? From the law enforcement agents? Or from a burden so heavy that it even made my knees tremble?

Forgiveness. What was forgiveness to a man like me? There was no malice in the world that I hadn't perpetrated, no one, not even God, should be able to forgive me. What lay behind the words of that old priest? Why did he forgive me? I had taken his peaceful life with complete disdain; he should have despised me until his last breath.

I never killed anyone again.

Desperation, guilt, and remorse completely inhibited me.

I stopped stealing, cheating, and frequenting prostitutes.

I wanted to find the true meaning behind those words, but even though I tried going to church, I found nothing that brought me peace. That man had ruined my life, a life of luxury and pleasure, and yet I couldn't allow myself to hate him.

Only once did I go to a confessional. I confessed everything, from the smallest offense to the most horrifying, but it didn't make me feel any better. The only thing the man on the other side dared to tell me was that my life lacked purpose.

Perhaps he was right. I never had anything, and I probably never will. It wasn't that I had to find something I wanted to do; it was that there was nothing I desired to achieve.

I decided that my life should no longer be lived. I took my time thinking about how to end it. Under what circumstances, and I even wondered if I should leave a note. For whom? There was no one to read it, anyway. My mother, surely, had died at the hands of my father long ago, and if my father was still alive, I wanted nothing to do with him. And then... as if a memory that I had obstructed myself long ago suddenly resurfaced, I remembered that child. That little brother who was once separated from me. It had to be him, my letter should be written for him.

Although it couldn't be that easy. After all, I only had the name of that boy, and I didn't even know if he was still alive. It was a lost cause from the beginning, but... it gave me a purpose; a motive.

For the next seven years, I searched for clues about my little brother, relying solely on his name. I returned to a life of crime. I had to do it to ensure that the fear my name instilled wouldn't fade away and so that I could move around undisturbed. I explored all the cities around my hometown, following step by step the traces that a sold child could have left behind, until I found him.

Nothing could guarantee that it was really him, but I knew. Deep down, I knew that unbeatable sheriff, that man who dispensed God's justice with unparalleled speed, could only be him.

A sheriff, a lawman... and me, the worst scum to have set foot on these lands.

It was perfect.

That was the redemption I sought.

If I was going to leave this world, I could only do it after confirming with my own eyes that the only hand faster than mine was that of my own blood.

I went to the famous town the sheriff protected and kidnapped the first woman who carelessly got close to me, along with her son. I tied them up and gagged them, though I didn't harm them. It's just one final act of wickedness. Anyway, nothing can save this man's soul. I know I don't deserve this redemption, but I want to at least leave with my head held high.

. . .

When the day of the duel arrived, I stopped to contemplate the town from the outskirts. It's... a good place. You can almost feel the tranquility in the air that its inhabitants live with. There is no doubt that the sheriff is, by all accounts, extraordinary.

There was no one in the streets, but I could see certain prying eyes peering out from the windows as I rode in and approached the church. There, only one man was waiting for me. As I dismounted my horse and looked up at my executioner, I felt such immense peace that I can say I didn't deserve it either.

That almost feverish eye, that inflated chest, and that well-built body. Just the imposing image of that sheriff makes him worthy of his reputation. He doesn't conceal his revolver like I do, hidden among my garments; he shamelessly displays it. Of course, he has no reason to be ashamed, as what he has there is nothing more than a divine instrument with which he works miracles.

I won't give away this fight. It wouldn't be right. This will be a true duel. I can perfectly see the eagerness he has to eliminate me, so I can only respond by exerting myself to offer him a worthy spectacle. An unparalleled duel between the two most powerful forces this side of the world has ever seen. Only the bell will dictate the beginning of my end. I tremble with excitement. There he stands, so self-assured. I want to approach him and shake his hand, man to man, while apologizing for being so, so different from what he became. But I can't. For once in my life, I must be honest with myself and face the fact that I have come too far, too far to remake myself at this stage.

Honor is approaching.

My greatest longing, my last hope.

The bell screams.

With the fluidity that characterizes me, in less than half the duration of a second, my hand is already resting on the grip of my revolver, but... by then, there were already three pieces of lead embedded in my chest.

Immense heat, followed by a cold that chills the bones.

I fall to the ground, bouncing like hot bullet casings when the cylinder of a revolver is emptied.

I can only look up at the sky. I have a strong desire to laugh. Impossible. Three bullets. In the same span of time that a man could never surpass me, this sheriff defeated me three times. Three times.

Yes, this is fine. This ending is fitting.

I can almost feel the tears welling up in my eyes.

I am so, so proud that it overwhelms me. Perhaps that's why I'm dying. Pride takes up so much space, it pushes the blood out to make room for itself.

My vision becomes blurry, and dark.

I'm losing consciousness.

My dream duel, my final confrontation.

So, so proud I am.

Kevin...

He will never know he's my younger brother.